# The Seed Sower.

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## Light on the Cloud.

There's never an always cloudless sky,
  There's never a vale so fair,
But over it sometimes shadows lie
  In a chill and songless air.

But never a cloud o'erhung the day,
  And flung its shadows down,
But on its heaven side gleamed some ray
  Forming a sunshine crown.

It is dark on only the downward side,
  Though rage the tempest loud,
And scatter its terrors far and wide,
  There's light upon the cloud.

And often when it traileth low,
  Shutting the landscape out,
And only the chilly east winds blow
  From the foggy sea of doubt.

There'll come a time near the setting sun,
  When the joys of life seem few,
A rift will break in the evening dun
  And the golden light stream through.

And the soul a glorious bridge will make
  Out of the golden bars,
And all its priceless treasures take
  Where shine the eternal stars.

J. M. SAVAGE.

## The Mother of Jesus and "Mother of God."

BY THE REV. GEO. ST. CLAIR, CARDIFF.

"And it came to pass as he said these things, a certain woman out of the multitude lifted up her voice and said unto him: Blessed is the womb that bare thee, and the breasts which thou didst suck."—Luke xi., 27.

This was a mother's way of expressing admiration for Jesus. It was like saying,—"Oh, to be the mother of such a son!" It reminds us of what we read, of Roman mothers who were proud when their sons had done valiantly in battle, and upon whom the credit was reflected, because they had trained their sons to be brave, and inspired them with a sentiment of patriotism. Or it reminds us of what a traveller said, after an interview with the mother of Goethe:—"Now I understand how Goethe has become the man he is." Somebody has said that men are what their mothers make them: and certainly many great men have gratefully acknowledged the large debt they owed to their mothers. We can hardly reflect upon the life and character of Jesus without regarding it as likely—most likely—that his mother had given a serious bias to his mind, and possibly had inspired him with the idea of assisting a much-needed religious reform. This chapter (Luke xi.) contains the

Lord's Prayer, and also enlarges on the principle that the disposition of parents towards their children is a revelation to us of God's gracious disposition towards us all. The teaching of Jesus was plain and convincing, acceptable, and comfortable; the character of Jesus inspired confidence. Men listened with astonishment. Women adored him. This woman in the crowd exclaimed :—"Oh, happy thing to be the mother of such a son!"

And so it was a thing to be proud of. And yet Mary, the mother of Jesus, may have been a homely woman, of only average ability and attainments. We judge that, because she was so little consulted in the circle of the disciples after the Crucifixion, and we might have anticipated it from the fact that she was a peasant woman, the wife of a carpenter. We may trust this utterance *about* her, more than the story of the angel Gabriel's announcement to her that she was highly favoured, and more than the song, in which she is made to rise to heights of poetry and say :—

"My soul doth magnify the Lord,
And my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour.
For he hath looked upon the low estate of his handmaiden:
For behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed.
For he that is mighty hath done great things,
And holy is his name."

These are possibly later inventions, and Mary may not have been a poet. It is to be regretted that invention did not stop there, but went on to make Mary as great as her son, and to offer her a worship proper only for a divine person. Of this there is nothing in the New Testament; and, indeed, hardly could be, because most of it was fabricated afterwards. Just as in the case of Jesus, the desire to know something more about Mary, appears to have sprung up only after her death, and when it was too late to satisfy the curiosity. After she was gone, new converts to Christianity would perhaps ask what she was like, and friends began to wish that they had her portrait. Now we do not know what she was like: there is no authentic portrait. There are plenty of pictures (and some of them very beautiful) of the mother of Jesus, with the infant in her arms. We might fancy that an artist had been called in—to the stable at Bethlehem—with a full sense of the historic importance of the occasion, realising that this child would live to be the founder of a new Religion, or, indeed, something more than that—with a knowledge that the world is about to be redeemed from the power of Satan; that this babe is an incarnation of the Deity. We observe that the artist has put a nimbus of glory round the child's head! Was there, indeed, such a glow, and did the artist perceive it? We are obliged to say that he did not; that it is all imagination; that the mother of the babe did not see any such halo. She had no idea that she and her son would bye-and-bye be worshipped. The portraits were not painted till long afterwards. There is, indeed, a tradition that St. Luke was an artist, and painted the portrait of Mary. A Madonna at Florence is said to be one of his best efforts, and to have the power of working miracles. But none of us can credit this, and since Luke was a physician, who travelled about with the Apostle Paul, and Paul had but little intercourse with the disciples at Jerusalem, the story seems even on that account an unlikely one. St. Augustine says: "We know not the face or the personal appearance of the Virgin Mary." This was in the fifth century. By this time, however, Christianity had become, as Mr. Lecky, the historian, says, "The central intellectual power in the world; but it triumphed not so much by superseding rival faiths as by absorbing and transforming them. Old systems, old rites, old images, were grafted into the new belief, retaining much of their ancient character, but receiving new names and a new complexion."

In the year 431 the Council of Ephesus expressed their desire that artists should paint Mary *with the Infant Child*; and the name or title was applied to her of "Mother of God." From that time, we may say, Mary was made equal to Christ, if not superior, both in the estimation of the people and in the actual teaching of the Church. Old pictures in Rome represent Christ and Mary seated side by side on their heavenly throne, he holding her by the hand, and she already crowned Queen of Heaven.

Prayers are offered to her that she should obtain favours from her son; "Regard us then, O Mary, most merciful, for in you, after God, we your servants, place all our hope." It is even said that her pity will soften the

anger of her son. Nay more (and shocking if it were not ridiculous) she is besought to calm the rage of her heavenly husband, so that his heart may be softened towards us. But this authority to command her Son, in heaven, is not deemed sufficient, and Mary is addressed in all the forms of prayer and praise which we use in coming to God. Saint Bonaventura, pre-eminent among Romish authorities, took the Psalms and substituted the name of Mary for the name of God; so that they read, "In thee, O Lady, have I trusted, let me never be confounded." "Let Mary arise, and let her enemies be scattered." He made the *Te Deum* to read—"We praise thee, Mother of God; we acknowledge thee, Mary the Virgin; All the earth doth worship thee, spouse of the Eternal Father." The same with the Litany. And even in our own time, the Lord's Prayer has been adapted, and printed in the form—"Our Mother, who art in heaven," &c.

Now I am not bringing forward these things in order to excite ill-feeling against Roman Catholics. Let us rather acknowledge the strong tendency of human nature in this direction and inquire what it means.

If the Lord's Prayer, worded in that way—"Our Mother, who art in heaven" — were addressed to God Himself, there might be no harm in it. There might be good in it. We might get comfort from it. Hebrew prophets have thought of God in both ways. Malachi said: "Have we not all one Father? Hath not one God created us?" Isaiah speaks in God's name and says: "As one whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort you!" It would, indeed, be comforting to feel that we had a Mother in Heaven, with all a mother's tenderness, and the fullest power to console. The doctrine of a Mother in Heaven was not imposed upon an unwilling people by the bishops of the Church. On the contrary, in the fifth century, when the Council of Ephesus had virtually decided that Mary was the Mother of God, and ought to be painted with the Divine Child in her arms (like Isis, "Queen of Heaven,") the decision gave such great joy that the city was illuminated, and the exulting crowd led the Fathers to their homes in triumph. Then soon was added to the Angelic salutation: "Hail, highly favoured" (already, it seems, in devotional use)—the clause: "Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us."

It seems to accord with the religious sentiment of many, that one may find more graciousness in a Divine Mother than in a Divine Father. "O Mary," exclaims the devout Blosius, "who could avoid loving you? You who are our light in the obscurity of doubt, our consolation in grief, and our hope in danger. Hail! hope of those who are in despair. Hail! You to whom the Son of God has given such influence that whatever you wish is executed instantly."

The exaltation of Mary has not had, in every way, a bad influence. On the contrary, as Mr. Lecky says: "The world is governed by its ideals, and seldom or never has there been one which has exercised a more profound, and, on the whole, a more salutary influence than the mediæval conception of the Virgin. For the first time woman was elevated to her rightful position, and the sanctity of weakness was recognised as well as the sanctity of sorrow.

In many ways we detect its influence. All that was best in Europe clustered around it, and it is the origin of many of the purest elements of our civilisation. But the price, and perhaps the necessary price, of this was the exaltation of the Virgin as an Omnipresent Deity of infinite power as well as infinite condescension."

It is just there that we feel a strong objection. We cannot consent to pay the price of the advantage. Besides, it offends our common sense to tell us that Mary, the peasant woman, has become the goddess of infinite power. It is clear to us that she cannot be everywhere present, to hear prayers and to answer them, and, therefore, the prayers offered to her must be futile and fruitless. We cannot befool ourselves by worshipping and supplicating the creature as though she were the Creator. Besides, we believe we may obtain all the advantages in another way.

What do I say?—that we can disbelieve in this Mother-Goddess, and yet retain all the advantage of the idea, as though it were true. Yes, I say so; and we may do it in this way. Let us recognise that the Creator himself is as sympathising as a mother, whereas the mother of Jesus, if she had infinite sympathy, is not omnipresent and almighty.

The tenderness of Christ himself is a revelation of the heart of God. One would have

thought there was scarcely any reason to doubt the sympathy of Jesus, and ask the intercession of his mother with him. Certainly Jesus was a man, but "gentleness when it weds with manliness makes a man;" and none can say that he was not truly manly.

> "His life was gentle! and the elements
> So mixed in him that Nature might stand up,
> And say to all the world,
> This was a man."

"His words were bonds . . . his love sincere, his thoughts immaculate; his tears, pure messengers sent from his heart; his heart was far from fraud as heaven from earth." He loved children. He was fond of flowers. Women adored him: "Happy the mother blessed with such a son!"

A great argument with Evangelical Christians is this: That we needed such an embodiment of the Deity, to bring God near to us, so that we might love him; and yet, again, that God himself is too august for us to approach, and we require this mediator. But that we should require a mediator between us and Jesus, even Protestant Evangelicals do not see. It is only Romanists who suppose that to be the case. They do so because they crave womanly sympathy, and they do not perceive or believe that Jesus was tender as a woman. We agree with Protestant Evangelicals in thinking that no intercession of Mary is needed to make Jesus propitious. We cannot see why they should suppose the mediation of Christ is required to make God favourable. A Protestant writer says: "There are, let us believe, multitudes whom the worship of the Virgin Mary restrains from vice, not because she hears their prayers or endows them with grace. They associate her with Christ, and behold her in his reflected glory . . . and although she withdraws attention from him, yet the influence of her example may, in many cases, be favourable to virtue." We may say the same thing of those who put Christ in the place of God. But really God himself is sympathetic, tender and Fatherly. He is the Power Divine and Source of All: but his love is as great as his power. It is just because he is a fount and source of love that there is any motherly love in mothers. He is kindly disposed towards us, without requiring mediation; and if it were not so, it would seem unlikely that he should alter his mind when pleaded with, for he is all-wise, and has decided on the best course already. He is not like earthly kings, who grant favours at the request of Prime Ministers and Court favourites. "Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him;" and, "As one whom his mother comforteth," so doth he comfort us. This being so, there is no call, even for Christ's intercession: God himself is gracious, and Jesus said so. Much less will the Divine Father wait for the pleadings and offices of Mary.

The entire system of the worship of Mary has been built up from a very slender basis; and indeed is quite as much without foundation as anything in the "Arabian Nights' Entertainments." It is purely fanciful. There is no authentic portrait of Mary, and not a particle of evidence for her immaculate conception, her resurrection, and ascension into heaven, and her coronation there. Her mediation is an invention; and it is not found at all in early Christian Art. She was most likely a very estimable woman, and might well be proud to have such a son; but the Church did wrong in calling her Mother of God and Queen of Heaven. The effective basis of her glorification has been the human yearning for motherly love and sisterly sympathy. The Mary of Romish theology is not a woman who has lived, and not a Being who exists now; but such a Divine Mother as the troubled human spirit craves for, as a heavenly fount of tenderness.

Such a fount of tenderness—inexhaustible and reaching all—cannot possibly exist in the carpenter's wife of Nazareth; but we ought to be able to find it in the Creator himself. There are misconceptions about God, as though he were too strong and stern and fearful for his creatures to come near him. God is our Father: and it is Jesus himself who bids us, when we pray, say "Our Father," and believe that if we are disposed to give good gifts to our children, much more will our Heavenly Father supply all our wants, and enrich us with heavenly blessings. We may rightly think of the Great Being, the Source of All, as our Mother as well as our Father. Not Mary, but God himself. If Jesus were God, then Mary would be the mother of God—and it is difficult to see how Protestant Evangelicals can dispute it—though the supposition would involve many absurdities. But there

is no contradiction in regarding God as combining the best qualities of both Mother and Father, and possessing them in infinite perfection and inexhaustible amount, as he is the Source of them all in all his creatures. When we think of God we must not leave out that motherly tenderness which the human heart yearns for.

## The Story of the Brontë Family.

### II.

AN ADDRESS BY L. P. JACKS.

The story continues in the same minor key. The aunt dies and leaves a little money to the girls. Charlotte comes home and resolves to make her first attempt as an authoress. She writes a story called "The Professor," which the publishers won't have. One of them advises her to try something on a larger scale, so she writes "Jane Eyre," apparently with great speed. The publishers did not hesitate this time. The book was printed under an assumed name, and in a month or two the reading world was all agog to know who "Currer Bell" might be. "A man of course," said the wiseacres. "Nobody but a man, with a man's knowledge of a man's heart, could draw a man like *Mr. Rochester*." It was as though a new force had sprung into existence not only in literature, but in life. Here was insight into character, dramatic skill, extraordinary opulence of language, a majestic and unconscious art—and, in addition, that rarer thing, the passion of life, the energy of spirit, the strong utterance of a heart saddened by the tragedy of life, made angry by its wrongs, the quality which makes literature immortal, which, when it appears in a novel or a drama or a poem, is like a warranty that five hundred years hence men's tears will flow at the words, or their laughter resound, or their blood boil as it does to-day.

Meanwhile Emily, too, had not been idle, though sadly shaken by an ever-increasing cough which the cold air of the Yorkshire moors was not likely to improve. Have you read "Wuthering Heights"? That is the name of Emily's romance. And many persons who know good literature when they read it, declare that "Wuthering Heights" is superior to the best of Charlotte's work. However, it stands as almost the sole monument of a mighty genius, and it is worthy of a mighty genius, worthy of her of whom Matthew Arnold says in his touching lines on Haworth Churchyard, that her soul

> "Knew no fellow for might,
> Passion, vehemence, grief,
> Daring, since Byron died—
> That world-famed son of fire—she, who sank
> Baffled, unknown, self-consumed;
> Whose too bold dying song
> Stirr'd, like a clarion blast, my soul."

But now another chapter in this outwardly commonplace, but inwardly strange, history unfolds itself. Branwell, the boy, was, as I have said, supposed to be *the* genius of the family. but in 1847, Branwell, then 30 years old, had become a drunkard, an opium taker, a complete moral and intellectual ruin. His days were spent in the parlour of the "Black Bull," where he seems to have held the dignified position of a drunken village oracle, the companion of soakers, threatening his poor father with this, that, and the other to extort money for drink. When the wretched creature was at home the girls were terrified and miserable, not daring to ask a decent soul to enter the house. This was Charlotte's daily portion in the little parsonage while "Jane Eyre" was being written. This was what Emily had under her eye while she penned "Wuthering Heights."

But release was not far distant. In August of 1848, Branwell Brontë, the famous story-teller of the old days round the kitchen fire, the manifold genius, the only son, the pride of his sisters, the hope of the family—now a complete physical and mental ruin—died, the victim of a diseased will. "A good thing that he should die"—the world said. But the girls didn't think so. Their tears flowed hot and fast; they thought of what might have been; but they showed very little to the world, and Emily's face looked more sphinx-like than before.

That was in August. Presently winter came. and Emily's cough grew worse. They told her she must discontinue the housework and take rest. She shook her head, rose early next day, and went through the regular tasks. They urged her to see a doctor, but she would have neither doctor nor medicine. Growing weaker day by day, sometimes in fever, sometimes sinking into deep fits of lethargy, Emily continued to lash her spirit to perform what had to be done. What a mighty human will can do in

a weak and perishing body, she did. She knew she was dying, but she said little. In the evenings she was better, and Charlotte would read the reviews of her work. Emily had written under the name of "Ellis Bell," and one of the wiseacre critics, after a penetrating study of "Wuthering Heights," declared his opinion that "the author was a man of uncommon talent, but dogged, brutal, and morose." This was read out to the poor consumptive, as she lay dying in a chair, and Charlotte tells us that she smiled, half in amusement, half in scorn. Perhaps it was the last time, for a month afterwards Emily died, just three months after Branwell.

That death smote Charlotte through and through. The two bereavements following one on another were enough to plough furrows in the strongest soul. But she bore up; she thought of her duty to support those who were left; she called her religion to her aid and rose to the occasion in keeping with the character Kingsley gave her—"a valiant woman made perfect through suffering." It was well she did bear up, for the end of her troubles was not yet. Hardly was the sound of one cough ended in the house than another began. A month after Emily's death, it was plain that Anne was soon to follow in the same road. Through winter and early spring she lingered on; in May they took her to Scarborough; before June was in she was gone. Charlotte was all alone. In nine months she had lost from her side a brother and two sisters, each of whom had talents which might have won the first rank in literature. We need no words to describe the terrible desolation of the little parsonage, the memories and the blighted hopes, the utter dreariness, the tears in the night, the cheerless labours of the day. But that soul was not made of common stuff. It was in the atmosphere which these events had made for her that Charlotte wrote "Shirley" and "Villette." When I think of the circumstances under which these novels were written, in a house redolent with sorrow and death, I am carried away with astonishment at the result, and I do not doubt that it will be remarkable. I know these novels will be at least sincere. I know they will be free from sham, from striving after effect, from literary grimaces, and from acting to the gallery. I expect them to come hot from the deeps of life, and I find they do so. They are the words of one who has faced the tragedy of life and faced it nobly. They have the unconscious dignity which belongs to great tragedy. They are not written by one who held deep theories about life, who was in any large measure a student of philosophy, of history, of society, as George Eliot and Mrs. Ward are; they are the work of one about whom all you need say is that she had lived, and to whom God had given the supreme gift of portraying in words those battles, those sorrows, those victories and defeats which we all go through, but which only the inspired soul can fitly describe.

But Charlotte's course was nearly run. Married in June of one year to Mr. Nichols, her father's curate, she died in March of the next. The sorrowful old father, childless now, still lived on. He died in 1865.

Charlotte Brontë was akin to those who learn in suffering what they teach in song. Except for the one divine gift of genius, her portion in life was made up of drawbacks. But the exception glorifies the tale. It is a tale which compels us to read between the lines: so read, the story drops its air of commonplace and grows great, stirring, pathetic. We see genius overcoming the disadvantages of obscurity, poverty, monotony, bodily weakness, sorrow, and a half-blighted youth, and even converting them into advantages. The story remains for all time one of the most moving chapters of human biography.

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TIME is the only gift in which God has stinted us; for He never intrusts us with a second moment till He has taken away the first, and never leaves us certain of a third.

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An eccentric character named John So, a native of Innerkip, bequeathed his property to a friend, on the condition that he would get engraved on his tombstone the following epitaph written by himself:—

"So died John So,
So so did he so,
So did he live,
So did he die,
So so did he so,
So let him lie."

## Jesus and St. Francis of Assisi.

If we would understand the life and personality of the "gentle Galilean" who, nearly 1900 years ago, walked with his faithful band by the Galilean lake and on the hills of Judah, we could not do better than study the life of perhaps the only perfect Christian since Jesus, the troubadour, knight and saint, Francis of Assisi. "Francis of Assisi," says Renan, "has always been one of the strongest reasons which has made me believe that Jesus was nearly all that the synoptic gospels have painted him to be." Francis did not benefit by all the recent research bestowed upon the gospel narratives, indeed, he held in some contempt, if we can ascribe such a feeling to so pure a soul, what is called learning and learned men. He had a sort of an idea, like Jesus, that God hides things from the wise and prudent and reveals them unto babes; he could scarcely write, but his name is great among the sons of men.

And we, what do we do with all our learning, with all these heaped-up volumes that would reveal to us the true Jesus? Oh, we quarrel about him; one says that he was God, another that he was surely man, one that he was a sinless man, another that that isn't philosophy, one that he said this, another that he said that, and so on *ad infinitum*. Most of us make a fetish of him, very similar to what Aristotle was in the Middle Ages, though often worse; all of us degrade him, and none of us live like him.

And here is Francis of Assisi who seldom even reads the scriptures, but hears one day a gospel lesson from the priest at mass and forsakes all and follows Jesus. It seemed to him that not the priest but the Crucified One himself was speaking to him. "And as ye go, preach, saying, the kingdom of heaven is at hand. Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, cast out devils; freely ye received, freely give. Get you no gold, nor silver, nor brass in your purses; no wallet for your journey, neither two coats, nor shoes, nor staff: for the labourer is worthy of his food."

So he forthwith threw away his staff, his wallet, his purse, his shoes, resolved to obey to the letter the precepts of gospel perfection. He gave up father and mother, and house and land. The Son of Man had no place to lay his head—neither had Francis. The Son of Man begged from door to door—so did Francis. The Son of Man was not anxious for the morrow—neither was Francis. The Son of Man considered the lilies and the birds of the air. Francis probably had an even deeper sensitiveness and love for all the objects of nature. He called them brothers and sisters, brother sun, "beautiful and radiant with great splendour," sister moon and the stars, brother wind and air and cloud, sister water, brother fire, sister mother earth. He would pick the worm up from the pathway that it should not be trodden upon, protect the lamb from slaughter, restore the fish to the water, bidding it to bless God. The birds would welcome him when they saw him; they did not fly away when he was near them. He praised God for all His creatures—he praised Him too for sister death, and *realized* what Jesus realized and taught, that "the Kingdom of God is within us."

The poor leper, so hideous and repulsive, whom all shunned with a great loathing, he would not slight. He kissed him, ate with him from the same dish, washed his sores, smiling ever the more radiantly the more offensive they were. No sign from him wounded his brother. He, at least, did not offend these little ones that they perished. He called them "God's invalids." What showers of blessing must have poured into his soul from these forsaken ones—what looks of gratitude and love! The divine depths are only stirred on these terms and only thus God-men are born.

Francis was a gay troubadour and a brave knight, happy in his Lady Poverty, so "long bereft" of her first love, "a thousand years and yet a hundred more." He and his companions were *joculatores domini*, the Lord's jongleurs, as who should say the Lord's jokers, taking life carelessly and blithely. Joy was the atmosphere they lived in and carried about with them. It was, we might almost say, a canonical rule in their order.

The Stoics were noble men, and loved nature, and taught in their own way as Jesus and Francis taught, that "the Kingdom of God is within us." But they themselves did not find it, and their outlook upon life was ever sad and resigned—a grin-and-bear-it sort of attitude. But Francis not only taught this—he first realized it—and how could he be sad, having found the pearl of great price?

The artists in those stormy days were wont to picture a Crucified One, torn, bleeding, all agony and terror. But at St. Damian, where Francis first gave himself to Jesus, the Crucified One has an expression of calm and of inexpressible sweetness. Wholly forgetful of self, he says, not "I suffer," but, "Come to me and I will give you rest." "My yoke is easy and my burden is light."

Francis took that yoke upon him. A yoke is not a drawback—it makes the journey easier, and the ox is very grateful for it. And the legend tells us how, on Monte Alverno—his Mount of Transfiguration—Francis had a vision and saw a seraph with wings outspread flying towards him from the utmost bounds of the horizon and flooding him with untold and untellable blessedness. "Much and greatly did he rejoice to see the gracious and benign aspect with which the seraph looked upon him, for its beauty was indescribable," says Thomas de Celano, his first biographer. *The seraph was nailed to a cross.* The vision disappeared, and Francis perceived on his body the marks of the nails—the stigmata of the Crucified One.

Thus were granted to Francis the two special gifts he had asked of God: First, to realize in body and soul the sufferings of Christ, and second, to be filled with that love, through which Christ suffered for his fellow-men. So, at least, the legend tries to tell us the untellable. Shall we dismiss it as an idle fable? Ah, no, all is symbol, may be, but behind the symbol how great a reality!

Shortly after leaving Monte Alverno Francis composed the "Canticle of the Sun," or "Song of the Creatures," according to Renan, after the Gospels the finest specimen of religious poetry. There was joy in his heart, and never, perhaps, has it found nobler expression.

Are we helped to understand the personality of Jesus from a life like this? I am sure so.

What was the first Rule of the Order of Francis? The same gospel lesson, with some additions, as Francis heard at the Portiuncula. (Matt. xix. 21; Luke ix. 1-6; Matt. xvi. 24-26).

"If thou would'st be perfect, go, sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me."

The first condition with Francis for all who would follow with him the road to gospel perfection was to sell all they had and give to the poor. He had given up all for Christ's sake and the gospel's—for the soul's sake—should he not equally demand it of others?

"The instinct for love and for the divine only slumbers in us. At the sight of beauty love always awakens; at the call of holiness the divine witness within us at once responds; and so it is that around those who preach in the name of the inward voice are seen to gather, streaming from all points of the horizon, long processions of souls athirst for the ideal. The human heart so naturally yearns to sacrifice itself that we have only to meet on our way one who, doubting neither of himself nor us, demands it of us without reserve, and we give him it forthwith. Reason understands a partial gift, a momentary surrender; the heart knows only whole sacrifices, and, like the lover to his betrothed, it says to its vanquisher, thine alone and for ever.

What has caused the miserable failure of all the efforts of natural religion is that its founders have not had the courage to lay hold of the hearts of men consenting to no partition. They have failed to perceive the heroic need of immolation which lies in the depths of every soul; and souls have avenged themselves by not heeding these too lukewarm lovers. Francis had too completely given himself not to claim from others an absolute surrender."*

So the brothers went forth, *nihil habentes omnia possidentes*, having nothing, yet possessing all things; poor, yet making many rich; not anxious for the morrow, trusting in God, knowing that he who cared for the sparrows would care for them; exhorting men more by their example than by their words; weak and ignorant, yet not anxious how or what they should speak, having faith in God, assured that he would tell them in that hour what they should speak, that, in truth, it would not be they who spoke, but the Father who dwelt within them; enduring hardship, ill-treatment, and opposition, rejoicing to suffer even as Christ suffered; begging from door to door (for the labourer in the things of the spirit is worthy of his hire); or exercising their several trades (for each originally had to work with his hands—

*Sabatier, *vie de Francois d'Assise*. Translated by Louise S. Houghton; Hodder and Stoughton, 1896.

many of them were domestic servants, some mended boots wherever they went, or helped with the harvest or vintage, or were water-carriers and porters, menial offices preferred, but never taking money, only food for their actual needs, or shelter); often hungry, often sleeping under the porches of churches or houses, or on perfect summer nights *couchés à la belle étoile* under the clear starry sky above the Umbrian plains; tending the lepers at the lazarettoes; praying and meditating in the grottoes of Rivo Torto, or in their huts of branches around their beloved chapel, the Portiuncula. What wonder that "the whole country leaped for joy: the barren land was already covered with a rich harvest, the withered vine began again to flourish!"

The first Gospel Rule he gave to his disciples, a verse or two here and there, chiefly from the Sermon on the Mount, and the narratives of the crucifixion—this, so far as I can discover, is all Francis built his life upon, in addition to the first-hand inspiration the limpid clearness of his own pure soul revealed to him. He was one of the world's great originals. Why, pray, when all the world regarded the life of the cloister and the supreme blessedness of contemplation and inward peace far from the tumult of the world as the Paradise of the saints—did he not there too find rest?

*Beati mortui quia quiescunt.*
*O beata solitudo.*
*O sola beatitudo.*

For his century, to imitate Christ, was such a life as breathes from every page of the "Imitation of Christ"—the noblest product of the cell, yet ever, and inevitably, with a damp, chilling, enervating atmosphere pervading it—other-worldly in short. Why did he act contrary to the spirit of his time? Did it never tempt him? Ah, yes, perhaps it was his great temptation, he could not wholly escape the aspirations of his time—yet he never ceased going about doing good. There was in him that love that was in Christ, to sacrifice himself, perhaps even his spiritual self, for his fellow-men. "*Toute idée, pour réussir, a besoin de faire des sacrifices; on ne sort jamais immaculé de la lutte ae la vie.*"—(Renan, *Vie de Jésus*). In not allowing the contemplative life to divorce him from men, and yet retaining it withal, often retiring alone, sometimes for days, even weeks, together, Francis proved one of the great originals of all time. We should remember too that ere the idyllic pictures of gospel perfection had wholly won his soul he was already well on his way thither. He was troubadour and knight before he was saint. The troubadour, the poet, if truly poet, is ever original, ever makes, creates—imitation blights him—and the true knight is ever a man of action. Without the gospel Francis would have found his way.

H. Harold Johnson.

## Whitherward?

IV.

The question which Mr. Jacks has asked in the January number of the *Seed Sower* is, it seems to me, of the greatest importance to the Unitarian Churches; and it is asked just at the right time. There are many other questions to be asked of the Unitarian body, but this question is fundamental. And I think that the worth, the use, even the very existence of the Unitarian body as a religious organisation, depend on the answer which will be given to it, not so much in words, not in letters of this kind, but in action.

The way the first article puts the question is—Where are we going to? In a church which is called the Church of Progress, are we going to deny in the future any more of the religious ideas held in the past than the advanced school among the Unitarians, exemplified by Dr. Martineau, have already denied? If so, says the article, we shall cease to be a religious body. There is nothing left to deny but the essentials of religion—of a Theistic religion. Mr. Wood agrees with the thought underlying the main question, and expands a codicil suggested to that thought by Mr. Jacks—that perhaps we have denied too much, and the progress may consist in going back to some of the ideas which have been put aside, and presenting in new forms the truths which underlie their errors. Mr. Armstrong evades the main question, though he does not think he does, and runs off into side issues based on the form merely in which the question has been asked, which practically is this—Do you mean to deny any more? Are there no truths which you cannot deny without ceasing

to be Theists, and in which you are bound to clearly express your belief? That question Mr. Armstrong does not even approach in his paper. He leaves it in the vague. He certainly says that the "process of our progress has been one of ever-ascending affirmation." The real problem at issue is, whether in this ever-ascending affirmation any more negations are possible "without the surrender of some vital principle" —vital, that is, to religion. And Mr. Armstrong gives no reply to that, though Mr. Jacks directly challenges a reply concerning the doctrine of the Immortality of the Soul. Is the denial of that doctrine, or the holding of it in suspense, consistent with a minister's religious position at all? Is it conceivably consistent with what Mr. Armstrong calls an "ever wider view of the Divine Holiness, and a more vivid realisation of the communion of the soul with God?" I know nothing of Mr. Armstrong's view of this matter. I should infer from that last sentence of his that he held the doctrine of Immortality strongly, and so, I should say, would all his readers. I only use the challenge in question as an example. Is the want of belief in Immortality consistent with the existence of a body which professes to be a Church of God? If we, as ministers, deny it, or come to deny it, or cease to assert it, are we not outside of Theism as we have developed it? We are certainly outside of the religion of Jesus Christ. Ought we not to have a clear statement of our belief, as a religious body, in this as in other matters which an overwhelming majority of unbelievers as well as believers in God consider essential to a religion which calls itself Theism, to say nothing of Christian Theism?

Of course, there is no finality in the development, as time goes on, of such main beliefs. Neither Mr. Jacks or Mr. Wood, nor anyone in our body, is likely to say that the form of religious ideas remains fixed. The essence of our view is that in the education God gives to the race, these ideas take higher and wider forms. Our conception of God expands year by year. The conception of His Fatherhood of Man, of the spiritual brotherhood of man which inheres in that Fatherhood, of the activities of love which follow on both as duties and ideals for us, of the direct relation of God to the soul (which to us is a personal relation), of a spiritual world of beings and of life beyond this world, and of the immortal continuousness of consciousness in it, in an ever nearer approach to our Father—these conceptions open out infinitely before us, and develop infinitely. *There*, there is no finality, and for that reason we decline to put them into any special dogmatic form.

But if as a body of ministers, or as a church, we come to deny those fundamental conceptions themselves, or to say—we are not sure whether we believe them or not—there I think there is a finality. If any of us should say—I am not sure that God exists, I do not know whether He is a Father or not; I am ignorant whether there is a spiritual world; I doubt whether self-forgetful love is eternal life; I cannot quite think positively that all men are bound into a spiritual brotherhood because they are all children of God; I do not know whether I believe in the immortality of the soul, or in a spiritual essence at all in every man—then that man is an agnostic, a humanitarian, an ethical teacher, but he is not a member of a religious church in our sense of the word religion. He is not a Theist *by profession*, much less a Christian *by profession*.

And this is what Mr. Jacks' question drives us to: Is the denial or the disbelief of these fundamental propositions progress in religion? Is it not the overthrow of all that we mean and have meant by religion? And do we not here reach finality? And the thought underneath his question, though he does not say so, is, it seems to me, this—Ought we not to clearly confess some ideas as absolutely true for us, and which the world will clearly understand are held by our ministers and the bulk of their congregations. For until such a general confession is made and understood we have no bond of union; we are a mere loose congeries of unrelated pebbles, rolling over and over one another on the shore of uncertainty; we have no right to the name of a church, and nothing whatever of its reality; we have no emotion behind us wherewith to move the world to action, such as comes from infinite ideas deeply loved and clearly believed; we shall drift —as we are tending to do at present—into a body of men, loosely and inoperatively connected together, who have no clear ideas on religion held by all, and incumbent on all, and who therefore speak with no clear voice to the

world around us, who are year by year getting out of touch with humanity, who are losing instead of gaining adherents, who tend more and more to live in the pride of criticism—within a ring fence apart from the world, who have lost passion in religion and joy, who cling desperately to their past when their beliefs were vivid and effectual, but whose present is gloomy and whose future is uncertain. Nor shall we escape this fate unless we make ourselves into a church or a body of men—I care not for the word used—which professes faith in certain fundamental conceptions which it considers of the essence of a religion, which, capable of infinite development, are yet themselves believed and loved as part of eternal truth; which every one in our body is supposed to hold as true, and which, if he ceases to hold as true, he is bound in honour and conscience to declare that he has ceased to believe—and, in consequence, to cease to belong to our communion.

STOPFORD A. BROOKE.

## When I Have Time.

When I have time, so many things I'll do
To make life happier and more fair
For those whose lives are crowded now with care!
I'll help to lift them from their low despair
When I have time.

When I have time, the friend I love so well
Shall know no more these weary toiling days;
I'll lead her feet in pleasant paths always,
And cheer her heart with words of sweetest praise,
When I have time.

When you have time, the friend you hold so dear
May be beyond the reach of your sweet intent;
May never know that you so kindly meant
To fill her life with sweet content,
When you have time.

Now is the time! Ah, friend, no longer wait
To scatter loving smiles and words of cheer
To those around whose lives are now so dear:
They may not meet you in the coming year,—
Now is the time.

The parodox of modern science is furnished by electricity. In no other department of science has progress in the matter of application been so great that experts can well afford to acknowledge that what they now know with regard to the true nature of the subject is less than what they professed to know a quarter of a century ago.

## Off Crozon.

A BRETON LEGEND.

The spire of old St. Malo makes a beacon fair and brave,
Where round its granite islets foams the angry Breton wave;
Far over lovely Dinan is St. Sauveur's shadow cast,
Where Du Guesclin's fiery heart is laid in peaceful rest at last.

At Coutances and at quiet Dol the great cathedral towers
Speak still in solemn beauty of a holier age than ours;
And, wonder of all time and tide, the glory of the land,
St. Michael's shrine still crowns his Mount, to rule o'er sea and sand.

But where the rocks of Crozon couch upon the sea-girt coast,
A nobler worship than them all it was for her to boast,
When, with silenced voice and darkened lamps, each threatened altar stood,
And from Loire to Rance the Terror drowned all fair Bretagne in blood.

Through whispering wood, by wild cliff-path, from town and château, came
Proscribed, suspect, and fugitive, priest, noble, peasant, dame;
Silent on Crozon's sands and dunes, gazing, till, like a star,
Over the heaving waste of waves a light showed faint and far.

Then quietly, with muffled oars, upon the rising tide,
The boats shot outward through the gloom, that ray their steady guide,
Where, driv'n from land upon the sea, at midnight's solemn hour,
For her true children Holy Church would still put forth her power.

Calm on the calm sea lay the barque, calm rose the altar there,
For votive lamp the crescent moon; for music through the air
Thrilled ever Ocean's ceaseless voice, while, rustling shroud and sheet,
The soft winds to the chanting priest made answer low and sweet.

There came the babe for baptism, there knelt the bride to wed,
There, over the uncoffined corpse, the funeral rites were said;
And the prayer of fearless faith arose in the imploring cry,
As, 'neath the roof no mortal built, the Host was raised on high.

Lingering where, up the glittering bay, sweeps the long ocean swell,
The pious Breton willingly will stay this tale to tell;
A grander temple for the Cross on earth can never be
Than the barque that through the Terror lay off Crozon on the sea.

S. K. PHILLIPS.

# Character Lessons.

## FOR SUNDAY SCHOOL CLASSES.

By George H. Young.

## LESSON I.

## TRUTHFULNESS AND HONESTY.

"Think truly, and thy thoughts
Shall the world's famine feed;
Speak truly, and each word of thine
Shall be a faithful seed;
Live truly, and thy life shall be
A great and noble creed."—H. Bonar.

Put away from thee a froward mouth, and perverse lips put far from thee.—*Prov.* iv. 24.

1. What is it to be truthful?
*To speak and act the truth.*
2. Are boys and girls as careful to *act* the truth as they are to *speak* it?
*They are not.*
3. Why not?
*Because untruthful action is not as easily detected as false speech*
4. How do you know that it is best to be truthful?
*A little voice within says so.*
5. Can all people give that answer?
*They can unless they have been so wicked that conscience has ceased to reprove.*
6. Are the best people careful about these things?
7. How do speaking and acting truly make one feel?
8. What effect has deceitfulness on character?
9. Can you suggest any case in which it would be innocent to deceive?
10. How does moral cowardice affect one's truthfulness?
11. What explanation can you give of Prov. xii. 22; Rom. xii. 9, 17; 2 Cor. viii. 21; Matt. vi. 22, 23?
12. How might one tell an untruth even though he kept silent?
13. Which is worse, to lie outright or to insinuate an untruth?
14. How does Jesus' life testify of these things?
15. Does religion ever recognize the innocence of untruthfulness?
16. Little Charlie, while playing ball, accidentally broke a pane of glass in a druggist's window. What course ought he to have taken about it?
17. Read the story of Stephen in Acts vii., and explain your feeling about his faithfulness to the truth.

Recite Eph iv. 25; Ps. li. 6-10.

To the Teacher.—Dwell on the ills that come from deception, prevarication, exaggeration, evasion, "white lies," and the strengthening influence of truthfulness on the character.

## LESSON II.

## SELF-CONTROL.

"How happy is he born or taught
Who serveth not another's will,
Whose armour is his highest thought,
And simple truth his highest skill."—
Sir Henry Wotton.

He that ruleth his spirit, is better than he that taketh a city.—*Prov.* xvi. 32.

1. What are you?
*Something which feels and acts.*
2. Can you always have pleasant feelings?
3. Why not?
*Because ill feelings sometimes result from my sick body.*
4. How is your body made sick?
*Mostly by careiessness.*
5. Are your actions dependent on your feelings?
6. Is it easy always to act just as you ought?
7. What should you endeavour to control?
*My feelings, actions, eating, drinking, and words.*
8. How would that course help your home?
9. Would you be glad to have everything of this sort all right?
10. Can you think of any way in which you ought to improve regarding these things?
11. Will you try to do it?
12. How is one responsible in these matters?
13. What do you say about any one having an uncontrollable will?
14. What is your opinion about our responsibility for our temper?
15. How does irritability affect character?
16. What results to character when one often loses self-control?

17. How did power of self-control aid General Grant in the War of the Rebellion?

18. When you read the story of Samson, what do you learn about him regarding self-control?

19. If one had all other graces, but lacked this, what value would you set on him?

20. Even if one is in ill-health, why should he still consider self-control a duty?

21. Why have we no right to plead sickness as excuse for lack of self-control?

22. Are sick people always mindful of these things?

23. Is old age any warrant for lack of self-control?

24. What aids to self-control ought the aged to possess?

25. How does care about this help one to grow old beautifully?

QUOTE Rom. xii. 18, 21.

TO THE TEACHER.—Depict the baneful effect of losing self-control. Show how the habit should be carefully acquired.

## Gossip.

BY FRANCIS TIFFANY.

It has been wittily said that common sense is called common sense because it is so very uncommon. In reality, common sense means sense about common things. Now gossip is a very common thing in this world, but the amount of sense talked about it is very small.

Gossip makes up nine-tenths of the conversation of great numbers of people,—sometimes of their most shrewd and delightful, and sometimes of their most trivial and stupid, conversation. And yet with what wholesale denunciation does one often hear gossip visited,—now as a sin, now as an idle waste of time, now as a vice that breeds no end of rancour and heart-burning. No discrimination is made between the different kinds of gossip indulged in; while, in point of fact, there is innocent gossip as well as malignant gossip, humorous gossip as well as cynical gossip, strong, horse-sense gossip as well as weak, silly gossip. It is not the gossip that is evil; but the malice, cynicism, or silliness, that often characterise the spirit in which it is uttered.

Gossip means, I take it, free, off-hand talk about other people, their characters, their ways, their foibles, their sense, and their nonsense. Well, what so interesting subject is there under the sun as other people? Certainly, horses, dogs, and cats are not half so entertaining. A lively interest in one's neighbours,—where's the blame of it?—so long as one does not poke into their kitchens to smell out what they are going to have for dinner, or open their letters to find whether they are really engaged to Amanda or not, but when all is fair and square and above-board.

Does not Pope say "The proper study of mankind is man?" Very well, then we must talk freely about man,—yes, and about boys and girls. You talk a great deal about one another, and compare notes. It is the only way you can learn to know about one another. All important is it that you should be quick to discriminate between the generous and mean, the sensible and foolish traits in your mates. Instead, then, of discouraging all such talk, parents and teachers ought, I think, to encourage it, while at the same time pointing out its dangers.

Few things in life are pleasanter than to fall in with a man or woman who can entertain an evening company by shrewd, humorous, and yet kindly and serious comments on the living society about us. It is as good as a play. It is a play, if Shakespeare is right in saying, "All the world's a stage, and all the men and women merely players." And yet it would be a very stupid play if there were not charming gossips to hit it off and set it on the boards for us. Thank heaven! every back-country village has some shrewd, lively old woman, or keen-witted farmer, who is the practical Shakespeare or Molière of the community, and takes the place of a whole troupe of travelling actors. When one of these dies, the village people feel that the death has eclipsed the gaiety of nations, as Dr. Johnson said Garrick's death did.

To be able, later in life, thus to play one's part among the right kind of gossips, one must begin while young the study of human nature and of the art of expression. The study must be prosecuted on your living mates, and cannot be profitably done on mere sawdust-stuffed dolls, the inner consciousness of which is too dry and

unresponsive. Yet this latter is the course some over-timorous moralists seem to advise as the only safe one. Remember, however, that you may study human nature from the life in two ways,—either that of seeking out only the trivial, contemptible, and bad, or of keeping an open eye and heart for that also which is good, sweet, and pure. If you adopt the first course, your gossip will be carping and malicious; if the second, it will be kindly, helpful, and wisely entertaining. I go in for the latter.—*The Christian Register.*

## Editorial Notes.

The Sheffield Conference, to begin on Tuesday, April 6th, bids fair to equal in importance and enthusiasm any of its predecessors. This triennial gathering of the tribes has now become the most popular and successful of our meetings. Apart from the subjects discussed, it may be amply justified as a re-union of old friends. We are not sure but that the best feature of these conferences is to be found in the social elements called into play,—old acquaintances renewed, new friendships formed, the flow of kindly feeling, the sense of comradeship, the interchange of opinions in the snuggery when the day's excitements are over, the speeches *not* given on the platform. Oh! that the readers of papers could hear the trenchant yet friendly criticism of the smoking-room and supper table!

We hear that our Sheffield friends are making great preparations, that Mr. Bromley and Mr. Manning are slaving night and day at the arrangements, that the electric light has been put into the chapel, and that generally the conference is to receive a real Yorkshire welcome.

Any disappointment that may have been felt when it was known that Bishop Ferencz, of Hungary, could not preach the sermon, has disappeared before the announcement that Mr. Stopford Brooke would take his place. It would have been something to have had a real live bishop in the pulpit; but it might have made us too proud. We can, moreover, easily resign ourselves to the absence of Episcopal sanction and glory, if we may hear Mr. Brooke. He is the one man left among us with a touch of genius. Among the poet-preachers of the 19th century, he easily takes the first place. His fervour, his flashes of inspiration, his power to move and thrill a congregation, his fine presence, his great sacrifice for truth, combine to make his an attractive and fascinating personality, and to give him a warm place in our hearts.

On the succeeding days there are to be papers—"The deepening of the spiritual life of our churches," "The means of recruiting our ministry," "Missionary work," etc. A new feature of the conference, imitated, we believe, from our American brethren, will be a distinctly theological paper, *without discussion.* This will be by Professor Carpenter, on "The Relation of the Belief in Immortality to our General Beliefs"—at the present time a most pressing and significant subject.

Next month we hope to give an account of the object lesson supplied us at Stratford-on-Avon in the Gold case and its opportunity. The refusal by the Stratford School Board to appoint Miss Gold as assistant teacher, on account of her Unitarianism, seemed to the Midland Christian Union, a call to let a little light into that beautiful town. Five lectures on Unitarianism have been given with overwhelming success, and we much regret that pressure on our space compels us to hold over a most graphic account of the movement until next month.

One deed for Christ, one cup of cold water given in His name, may bear with it the spring of a life's devotion.

Christ not only taught the truth, but lived it. He came not merely to tell truth, but to make truth tell.

Some men seem to think they can prove devotion to a good cause by blessing it with a loud voice, and bustling about it in a fussy manner.

One duty done may discover ten duties unthought of; but the performance has given us power to labour, as well as disclosed work to do.

# THE CHILDREN'S PAGE.

## Why?

Why are the blossoms
Such different hues?
And the waves of the sea
Such a number of blues!
So many soft greens
Flit over the trees?
And little grey shadows
Fly out of the breeze?

Why are the insects
So wondrously fair,
Illumining grasses
And painting the air?
You dear little shells,
Oh, why do you shine?
And feathery sea-weed
Grow fragile and fine?

Why are the meadows
Such gardens of grace,
With infinite beauty
In definite space?
Each separate grass
A world of delight?
O flowering hedges
Why are you so bright?

Why are our faces
Such lovable things,
With lips made for kisses,
And laughter that sings?
With eyes full of love,
That sparkle and gleam?
Through beautiful colours
That change like a dream?

Think for a moment—
Look up to the sky!
Question your heart: it
Will answer the why!
Bright as the glitter
Of beauty unfurl'd—
Boundless the love that
Has fashioned the world!

## Partners.

A sturdy little figure it was, trudging bravely by with a pail of water. So many times had it passed our gate that morning that curiosity prompted us to further acquaintance.

"You are a busy little girl to-day."

"Yes'm."

The round face under the broad hat was turned toward us. It was freckled, flushed, and perspiring, but cheery withal.

"Yes'm: it takes a heap of water to do a washing."

"And do you bring it all from the brook down there?"

"Oh, we have it in the cistern mostly; only it's been such a dry time lately."

"And there is nobody else to carry the water?"

"Nobody but mother, an' she is washin'."

"Well, you are a good girl to help her."

It was not a well-considered compliment, and the little water-carrier did not consider it one at all; but there was a look of surprise in her gray eyes and an almost indignant tone in her voice, as she answered:—

"Why, of course I help her! I always help her all the time. She hasn't anybody else. Mother'n me's partners."

Little girls, are you and mother partners? Do you help her all you can?

## A Dog Story.

When the guest of Rev. Edward H. Ingle, in Roanoke, Va., I was asked by Mr. Ingle to make the experiment whether I could bring into my conversation with him the word "holes" without its being curiously noticed by his dog. I tried it more than once, not emphasizing the word or making it louder than any other words. The first time the word "holes" reached his ear the dog looked toward me with an expression of apprehension. The second time he rose, curled his tail between his legs, and stood watchful, as if to know whether he was to be further disturbed. The third time he left the room, with unmistakable demonstrations of alarm and shame. Mr. Ingle told me, as the only explanation he could give, that the dog had dug holes in the grass on the lawn, and had been sharply reproved and scolded for it, never punished otherwise.

We have a dog which will do the same thing, for precisely the same reason, on hearing the word "ducks." The little wretch killed a tame duck, and was very badly flagellated.

## The Lost Lamb.

Dr. Baedeker, who has made a journey to Eastern Siberia from the Transcaucasus, was ascending on one occasion a mountain side near Shemaka, at night. In the gray dawn his party was hailed by an Armenian shepherd, who was followed by his flock, and who bore a weakly lamb in his arms. Presently, the man stood still, and bent in an attitude of anxious listening for some time, then gently laid the lamb on the ground, and calling his dog, committed the flock to its keeping, while he started off alone into the rocky solitude. Dr. Baedeker and his guides waited to see the result; and in about an hour, the shepherd's figure stood out in the sunrise on the heights above, and with it that of the lost sheep he had gone into the wilderness to seek. What poem on earth could be more touching or more beautiful than this scene, older than history, yet new every morning!

JOHN BELLOWS.

## "Your Father Knows."

O Teacher, most divine,
What blessed words were those
Spoken to careful, troubled hearts,
"Your Heavenly Father knows."

O glorious, welcome truth,
O glad assurance this,
That He who heaven and earth hath made
Our Heavenly Father is!

And every blade of grass,
And every flower that blows,
And every bird that cleaves the air,
Our Heavenly Father knows.

In Him we live and move,
Nor can a sparrow fall
Without the notice of His eye
Who loves and cares for all.

He reads our inmost thought,
He feels for all our woes;
The very hair upon our head
Our Heavenly Father knows.

And every step we take,
And all that lies before
Are known to Him who leads us on
To higher good in store.

Be this, in darkest days,
The troubled heart's repose,
That all we are, and all we need,
Our Heavenly Father knows.

*Belfast.* J. STRONE.

## Varieties.

The oldest love-letter in the world is in the British Museum. It is a proposal of marriage for the hand of an Egyptian princess, and it was made 3500 years ago. It is in the form of an inscribed brick.

"Isn't the mountain air bracing?" said Mr. Hicks. "Yes, pretty bracing," said Wallie. "It doesn't make my bicycle go any better, though, pumping this mountain air into the tires, than the plain, old home air does."

"Your aff. son" was a signature intolerable to Emerson. He instructed his children never in their letters to abbreviate words of courtesy or of affection. He said, "To abbreviate a word of affection, as if it were not worth the time required to write it out in full, is to cast a slur upon the sentiment expressed by that word."

Truth's supreme revelations come in sorrow to individuals, and in war to nations.

Abraham Lincoln was fond of a good story; and it is a well known fact that he often illustrated an important point in the business at hand by resorting to his favourite pastime. Probably one of the best he ever told he related of himself when he was a lawyer in Illinois. One day Lincoln and a certain judge, who was an intimate friend of his, were bantering each other about horses,—a favourite topic of theirs. Finally, Lincoln said:—

"Well, look here, judge, I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll make a horse trade with you, only it must be upon these stipulations: neither party shall see the other's horse until it is produced here in the courtyard of the hotel, and both parties must trade horses. If either party backs out of the agreement, he does so under a forfeiture of $25."

"Agreed!" cried the judge; and both he and Lincoln went in quest of their respective animals.

A crowd gathered, anticipating some fun; and, when the judge returned first, the laugh was uproarious. He led, or rather dragged, at the end of a halter the meanest, boniest, rib-staring quadruped—blind in both eyes—that ever pressed turf. But presently Lincoln came along, carrying over his shoulder a carpenter's horse. Then the mirth of the crowd was furious. Lincoln solemnly set his horse down, and silently surveyed the judge's animal with a comical look of infinite disgust.

"Well, judge," he finally said, "this is the first time I ever got the worse of it in a horse trade."

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PHILIP GREEN, 5, ESSEX ST., STRAND, LONDON, W.C.

# THE CHILDREN'S PAGE.

## Why?

Why are the blossoms
Such different hues?
And the waves of the sea
Such a number of blues!
So many soft greens
Flit over the trees?
And little grey shadows
Fly out of the breeze?

Why are the insects
So wondrously fair,
Illumining grasses
And painting the air?
You dear little shells,
Oh, why do you shine?
And feathery sea-weed
Grow fragile and fine?

Why are the meadows
Such gardens of grace,
With infinite beauty
In definite space?
Each separate grass
A world of delight?
O flowering hedges
Why are you so bright?

Why are our faces
Such lovable things,
With lips made for kisses,
And laughter that sings?
With eyes full of love,
That sparkle and gleam?
Through beautiful colours
That change like a dream?

Think for a moment—
Look up to the sky!
Question your heart: it
Will answer the why!
Bright as the glitter
Of beauty unfurl'd—
Boundless the love that
Has fashioned the world!

## Partners.

A sturdy little figure it was, trudging bravely by with a pail of water. So many times had it passed our gate that morning that curiosity prompted us to further acquaintance.

"You are a busy little girl to-day."

"Yes'm."

The round face under the broad hat was turned toward us. It was freckled, flushed, and perspiring, but cheery withal.

"Yes'm: it takes a heap of water to do a washing."

"And do you bring it all from the brook down there?"

"Oh, we have it in the cistern mostly; only it's been such a dry time lately."

"And there is nobody else to carry the water?"

"Nobody but mother, an' she is washin'."

"Well, you are a good girl to help her."

It was not a well-considered compliment, and the little water-carrier did not consider it one at all; but there was a look of surprise in her gray eyes and an almost indignant tone in her voice, as she answered:—

"Why, of course I help her! I always help her all the time. She hasn't anybody else. Mother'n me's partners."

Little girls, are you and mother partners? Do you help her all you can?

## A Dog Story.

When the guest of Rev. Edward H. Ingle, in Roanoke, Va., I was asked by Mr. Ingle to make the experiment whether I could bring into my conversation with him the word "holes" without its being curiously noticed by his dog. I tried it more than once, not emphasizing the word or making it louder than any other words. The first time the word "holes" reached his ear the dog looked toward me with an expression of apprehension. The second time he rose, curled his tail between his legs, and stood watchful, as if to know whether he was to be further disturbed. The third time he left the room, with unmistakable demonstrations of alarm and shame. Mr. Ingle told me, as the only explanation he could give, that the dog had dug holes in the grass on the lawn, and had been sharply reproved and scolded for it, never punished otherwise.

We have a dog which will do the same thing, for precisely the same reason, on hearing the word "ducks." The little wretch killed a tame duck, and was very badly flagellated.

## The Lost Lamb.

Dr. Baedeker, who has made a journey to Eastern Siberia from the Transcaucasus, was ascending on one occasion a mountain side near Shemaka, at night. In the gray dawn his party was hailed by an Armenian shepherd, who was followed by his flock, and who bore a weakly lamb in his arms. Presently, the man stood still, and bent in an attitude of anxious listening for some time, then gently laid the lamb on the ground, and calling his dog, committed the flock to its keeping, while he started off alone into the rocky solitude. Dr. Baedeker and his guides waited to see the result; and in about an hour, the shepherd's figure stood out in the sunrise on the heights above, and with it that of the lost sheep he had gone into the wilderness to seek. What poem on earth could be more touching or more beautiful than this scene, older than history, yet new every morning!

JOHN BELLOWS.

## Midland Christian Union.

The annual meetings of the Union were held in Birmingham, on Monday, March 15th. The business meeting took place in the morning, at the Old Meeting Church, Bristol Street, the Rev. L. P. Jacks presiding. Among those present were the Revs. A. N. Blatchford, Dendy Agate, Joseph Wood, A. A. Charlesworth (secretary), J. Harrison (missionary agent), E. P. Hall, J. C. Street, H. McKean, A. Shelley, Lieutenant-General Phelps, and Messrs. H. K. Beale, T. N. Tait, E. L. Tyndall, C. Harding. T. H. Forrester, G. Titterton, W. Grainger, W. H. Nightingale, W. H. Ryland, and A. W. Worthington.

The President, in moving the adoption of the reports, said that it had been held that rapid developments in the direction of Unitarianism in other quarters made their mission work needless. That movement, however, in his opinion meant to them an opportunity and a call of duty —(hear, hear). There was the opportunity. As for the need, while the movement of thought, so far as it was a movement of thought, was in their direction there was another movement which was not a movement of thought at all, but rather a movement of anti thought, which was taking place on an even larger scale than that of the movement of thought itself. Their president of last year (the Rev. Joseph Wood) warned them against the tremendous recrudescence of forces antagonistic to their ideas that had recently taken place, against the revival of militant sacerdotalism, which made their protest increasingly needful. The need was greater to-day than it was twelve months ago. In proof of that he appealed —in no controversial spirit—to recent developments in the sphere of education—(hear, hear). As to the origin of the Education Bill now before Parliament, there might be some difference of opinion, but there were many who believed that the origin lay in clerical pressure and clerical ambition—(hear, hear). The inference was that they must expect in the near future a further development of clerical aims and a still stronger assertion of priestly authority. What priestly ambition meant in a small country town, might be studied with very great effect at the present time in Evesham—(hear, hear). One of the ways in which the Midland Christian Union could help them was in organising and economising the preaching powers of their ministers. Speaking generally, he believed that he was strictly within the mark in saying that no man could go on for a long term of years producing two sermons a week without forfeiting his chance of doing full justice to his powers, doing his health irreparable injury, and bringing his creative power when he had reached the age of fifty into the condition of a squeezed-out sponge. He said this with a certain amount of deference in the presence of brethren who had reached the age of fifty without having experienced such results, but these were the exceptions, they were simply the survivors of a process which had done great injury to others. To take a young man just out of college and expect him to produce two sermons a week regularly all the year round was to set that young man to dig his grave in more senses than one, and the more gifted the man the greater the damage done. James Martineau would never have been the man he had been if in his youth he had been expected to fulfil the demands now made upon young ministers. If the laity only knew what these demands meant; if they understood the degree of mental anxiety involved—mental anxiety which was almost enough sometimes to kill the spiritual life—he was quite sure the demands would not be made. He suggested that a return to the more frequent exchange of pulpits that prevailed in the past might be beneficially brought about by the union.—Mr. G. Titterton seconded the motion, which was carried unanimously. — The officers of the union having been re-elected, the Rev. J. Wood moved a resolution adopting the scheme for building a church in the Waverley Road, Small Heath, the building contract to be signed on the fund reaching £1000.—Mr. Forrester seconded the motion, which was carried unanimously.

Luncheon for delegates and visitors was provided at the Grand Hotel; about 80 were present. In the afternoon, the Rev. A. N. Blatchford, B.A., preached the annual sermon in the Old Meeting Church. There was a good congregation. Afterwards, about 250 friends sat down to tea in the Old Meeting Schoolroom.

In the evening a public meeting was held in the Town Hall. Sir J. T. Brunner, M.P., presided, and amongst those present, in addition to those mentioned at the earlier proceedings, were Mrs. Osler, Messrs. R. Peyton, H. Payton, H. New, Howard Smith, G. Titterton, T. N. Tait, G. H. Forrester, A. Browett, Ernest Martineau, &c.—The Chairman referred chiefly to the Education Bill, and gave a review of educational progress during the last quarter of a century.—The Rev. J. C. Street moved a resolution congratulating the Union on the work of the past year. He said that not one of the churches was weaker than a year ago, but all of them were stronger. He should like to know what Evangelical Council could make such a statement.—The Rev. Dendy Agate seconded the motion, which was passed. — The Rev. L. P. Jacks next proposed: "That this meeting of the subscribers and friends of the Midland Christian Union rejoices in the success of the services at Small Heath, and, feeling that the time has fully arrived when the congregation should be provided with a suitable and permanent home, commends the building fund now started to the generous support of the Churches."—This was seconded by Mr. F. W. Ryland, and supported by Rev. Joseph Wood, and carried unanimously.—Mrs. Osler moved: "That no bill dealing with elementary schools can be satisfactory to the Free Churches which does not secure for Board schools an equal share with Denominational schools in any increased aid from Government, which does not provide for some measure of local representative control in the management of all schools receiving the Government grant, and which does not secure teachers from theological tests as a condition of employment."—The Rev. R. A. Armstrong seconded.—The Rev. E. P. Hall moved, and Mr. Field seconded, the previous question.—On being put to the vote, only ten hands were held up in its favour, and the original resolution was carried *nem. con.*—A vote of thanks to the chairman was moved by General Phelps. A united choir of 200 voices led the singing, and gave an anthem in most effective style. We express our sympathy with the choir that, owing to the want of time, their second anthem was cut out. We congratulate the officers of the union on a most successful day.